Governmnent of Saskatchewan

Update on Early Childhood Development 2000/01

Saskatchewan's Action Plan for Children

Opportunities

Our future lies with our children.

Powerful evidence from neuroscience shows that the early years – especially those from conception to age three – are the ones where we develop most of the skills that will affect us for the rest of our lives. Giving our children the best possible start in life is, therefore, one of the most important investments we can make in our future as a province and as a people.

This report highlights the progress made and the collaborative work undertaken in support of Saskatchewan's Early Childhood Development Strategy. In partnership with community-based groups and the Government of Canada, the provincial departments of Health, Social Services, Learning, and Government Relations and Aboriginal Affairs are pooling resources to create a seamless, integrated system to aid Saskatchewan's most vulnerable children and their families.

Challenges

Saskatchewan faces social and economic challenges that have important implications for the health and well being of children:

- Approximately 18 percent of Saskatchewan children are living in poverty, down from about 24 percent in 1993;
- Our teen pregnancy rate is currently above the Canadian national average and is a particular challenge among young Aboriginal women;
- Our infant mortality rate is high when compared to other provinces;
- Approximately 20% of our children and youth cope with mental health disorders that affect their ability to lead happy, productive lives;
- Child abuse and violent behaviours are a problem among children and youth. More young people are coming into conflict with the law;
- The Aboriginal population is growing more quickly than any other segment of the population. Many young Aboriginal people live in relatively poor inner city pockets in large urban communities or in remote northern areas of the province and face a variety of social challenges;
- There is a continuing population shift from rural communities to larger urban centres in Saskatchewan. Health, education and social support systems related to early childhood development must be sensitive to this shift.

When children and their families face challenges such as poverty, unemployment, poor education and literacy levels, poor housing, and lack of support in their communities, they are less likely to develop into healthy and productive adults. Research shows they are at higher risk of:

- Dropping out of school;
- Developing chronic health conditions;
- Becoming involved with the law;
- Becoming or remaining dependent on social assistance;
- Being exposed to violence and abuse;
- Being unemployed or employed in low paying jobs.

These challenges are often inter-related. The more difficulties faced, the greater the risk. For example, if parents have limited education, they are less likely to be employed. If they are unemployed, they are more likely to live in poverty and face other issues such as inadequate housing and health problems. The cumulative effect of multiple challenges can have a profound impact on children.

No single service can address all of the issues faced by these children and their families. Comprehensive, integrated programs involving partnerships between government and communities are needed. Responses that are culturally relevant, meaningful and community-based must be developed. These are the considerations that guide Saskatchewan's early childhood development initiative.

Since 1997, we have worked toward creating a long-term strategy targeting the needs of Saskatchewan's youngest children and their families. We have consulted with communities and made improvements in service. This collaborative approach involves strategic planning, compiling inventories of existing services, assessing needs and co-ordinating services. At local levels, a number of communities have developed networks of integrated, culturally appropriate support services for young children and their families.

Partnerships

Fundamentally, the early childhood development initiative is about partnerships – governments at all levels working with community-based groups to build a brighter future for all Saskatchewan people. There is a link to the Strategy for working with Metis and Off Reserve First Nations Peoples, which is also based on partnership arrangements.

In June of 2000, the Saskatchewan government directed resources to the further development of an early childhood development strategy. A unit dedicated to begin planning for implementation of early childhood development programs was subsequently established.

In September 2000, efforts in this area were significantly intensified when the Prime Minister of Canada and the Provincial Premiers jointly announced a commitment to improve and enhance early childhood development services across Canada. This commitment amounts to $2.2 billion to provinces and territories over five years, beginning in 2001-02. For Saskatchewan, this means $73 million over the five-year period.

Governments also agreed that they would report annually to the public on current activities and progress. This report provides a short summary of Saskatchewan's programs and services to March 2001 and our initial progress in delivering improved services to very young children and their families. Future reports will describe new programs that have been implemented and the tangible results that have been achieved.

Moving Forward

To realize their full potential, all Saskatchewan children need positive stimulation and nurturing during the critical early years, regardless of family circumstance. Programs targeted at children that live in challenging circumstances have lasting effects in many areas:

- Improvements in physical, mental and social development;
- Fewer referrals to special education supports; and
- Lower dropout rates in school.

These programs also have considerable social benefits, including higher educational and occupational aspirations of children, lower rates of juvenile crime and arrest, fewer teen pregnancies, and a lower percentage of participants receiving social services.

Our commitment to nurturing our very young children will have a profound impact on our society. Social and economic inequities will be reduced. Economic productivity will increase. Significant cost savings in social support systems will be achieved.

Our commitment to early childhood development will help to build family, community, and social and economic prosperity, now and for generations to come.

Nurturing Healthy, Happy Children

Our Progress to Date

Saskatchewan currently provides numerous supports to children in the early years. Profiled below are programs and services funded directly or indirectly by the Government of Saskatchewan in 2000/2001 that meet the unique needs of children ages 0 to 5 in the following three areas:

- Healthy Pregnancy, Birth and Infancy
- Parenting and Family Supports
- Early Childhood Development, Learning and Care

Healthy Pregnancy, Birth and Infancy

Department	Program Description	2000-01 Expendiures
Saskatchewan Health*	**PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES** **Pregnant Adolescent Support Program** ❖ Public health nurses deliver health education and counselling to pregnant adolescents and significant others **Prenatal/Postnatal Home Visiting** ❖ Prenatal education available to all pregnant women ❖ In-home and post natal home visitations are offered through health districts **Prenatal Classes** ❖ Available province-wide, participation is voluntary ❖ Offered in later trimester, focus on childbirth and delivery **Child Health Clinics** ❖ Includes a wide scope of services provided at 2, 4, 6, 12, 18 months and 3-4 years, concurrent with immunization	$ 11,958,000
Saskatchewan Health* Saskatchewan Social Services and Health* Saskatchewan Health*	**ADDICTIONS** **New Beginnings: La Ronge Family Intervention Project** ❖ Pilot project includes a paraprofessional home-visiting program for high-risk, chemically dependant women ❖ Provides support to women currently pregnant or those with an FAS/FAE child at subsequent risk **FAS/FAE in Saskatchewan: Programming for Education and Prevention– Saskatchewan Institute for the Prevention of Handicaps** ❖ An approach using culturally sensitive activities to support women, children and families at risk ❖ Activities include community development, public education and training **Diagnostic Services for Children with Suspected Fetal Alcohol Exposure – Clinical Teratology Program, University of Saskatchewan** ❖ Expands the diagnostic capacity at the Alvin Buckwold Child Development Program in Saskatoon ❖ Provides education and training for other health professionals in assessing for FAS	$ 60,000 $ 40,000 $ 79,600 $ 95,000
Saskatchewan Social Services	**INFANT CARE** **Teen Infant Support Centres and Homes** ❖ Care for up to 12 infants and toddlers in centres that are part of the school facility ❖ Provide support and guidance to teen parents.	$ 712,000

Parenting and Family Supports

Saskatchewan Social Services Saskatchewan Health* Saskatchewan Social Services	**PARENTING SUPPORTS** **Teen and Young Parent Program** ❖ Includes: Pregnancy Counselling, Parenting Support, Life Skills Management, Education Counselling and Support ❖ Voluntary, targeted at pregnant and parenting teens and young parents ❖ Scope and focus matched to individual needs **Successful Mother's Program** ❖ Preventative, early intervention home and community-based program targeted at teen, young and disabled parents living in disadvantaged conditions ❖ Addresses health, nutrition and lifestyle issues related to well-being of infants, young children and parents ❖ Voluntary, participants matched with volunteer mentors ❖ 15 programs provided through health districts **Healthy Parenting** ❖ Self study program for parents and expectant parents, delivered by the Saskatchewan Institute for Prevention of Handicaps for children birth to age five **Nobody's Perfect** ❖ Parenting education program for parents of children birth to age five ❖ Targeted at young, single, socially, culturally and geographically isolated parents with low income and limited education ❖ Co-ordinated by the Saskatchewan Institute for Prevention of Handicaps, delivered by trained facilitators	$ 1,022,000 $ 490,000 $ 55,000 $ 50,000
Saskatchewan Social Services	**FAMILY SUPPORTS** **Community Solutions** ❖ Funds partnerships between licensed child care facilities and community partners (health, school districts, agencies) **Child Day Care Subsidies** ❖ Provides financial assistance for low income families to subsidize cost of licensed child care ❖ Available to working parents, those looking for work, attending educational or training programs	$ 300,000 $ 10,269,000

Early Childhood Development, Learning and Care

Department	Program Description	2000-01 Expenditures
	CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT	
Saskatchewan Health*	**Early Childhood Development Program** ❖ Pipestone Health District provides family support services to young children living in disadvantaged conditions ❖ Paraprofessional family support workers provide information and assistance to connect with community services	$ 34,000
	Early Childhood Psychology Program ❖ 10 psychologists offer screening, assessment, referral and counselling services for infants and pre-schoolers with developmental delays	$ 605,000
Saskatchewan Social Services	**Early Childhood Intervention Program** ❖ To reduce severity and lessen impacts of developmental disabilities experienced by young children ❖ Home teachers/therapists provide in-home services for children birth to 5 years ❖ Currently 16 programs throughout the province	$ 1,800,000
	Child Day Care Homes/Centres – Infant Centres ❖ 126 centres serve 4,650 children ranging in age from 6 weeks to school-aged including after school care ❖ 371 homes serve 2,600 children	$ 4,147,000
	Community Living Division ❖ Provides case management services, respite and in-home support for children with disabilities	$ 230,000
Saskatchewan Health*	**Development Assessment Clinic** ❖ Assessment and monitoring of premature or at risk children until age two, available only in Regina	$ 275,000
	Children's Program – Wascana Rehabilitation Centre, Regina ❖ Provides access to specialized services for preschool program for children with severe disabilities	$ 1,700,000
	Alvin Buckwold Centre, Saskatoon ❖ Services for children with multiple disabilities, pervasive developmental disabilities ❖ Provides two preschool programs in partnership with Saskatoon Public School Division, Saskatchewan Learning	$ 1,295,000
	Early Childhood Progam - Child and Youth Mental Health Services ❖ Saskatoon District Health provides a multi-disciplinary program for children, 2 1/2 to seven years of age with emotional and behavioural challenges, and supports for their families. ❖ Disciplines represented in the program are psychology, psychiatry, speech pathology, social work and family therapy.	$ 500,000
	Speech and Language Pathology Program ❖ Provide preschool speech and language assessment, therapy, training for parents and caregivers	$ 1,300,000
	Saskatchewan Preschool Aural Rehabilitation Centre ❖ Provides assessment and rehabilitation (using both hearing aids and cochlear implants), as well as auditory and verbal therapy, to children with a hearing loss.	$ 53,000
	Early Skills Development Program ❖ Intensive early intervention program for kindergarten children with very aggressive and violent behaviours ❖ Available in the Battlefords and Saskatoon	$ 140,000
Saskatchewan Learning	**Preschool Designated Disabled Program** ❖ School boards provide programs and services for pre-school children with wide range of disabilities	$ 920,000
Saskatchewan Social Services	**SCEP Centre, Regina** ❖ Intensive remedial program for children 2 to 8 years ❖ Designed for children experiencing delays or difficulties in socialization, communication and learning	$ 129,000
	Child Day Care Inclusion Program ❖ Enhanced funding to licensed day care programs that support the inclusion of children with diverse abilities	$ 829,000
	EARLY LEARNING	
Saskatchewan Social Services	**Preschool Support Projects** ❖ Integrated programming delivered to about 150 three to four year old children to support healthy social, emotional and physical development. ❖ Provided by Prince Albert WestFlat Preschool, LaLoche Preschool and Regina Early Learning Centre	$ 471,000
Saskatchewan Learning	**Pre-kindergarten Program in Community Schools** ❖ Quality education to help nurture social, emotional, intellectual, physical development of high needs children ❖ Parental involvement central to success, runs in 31 schools, funding provided for an additional 34	$ 880,000
	Kindergarten ❖ Available to most Saskatchewan children, offered at the discretion of each school board	$ 9,600,000
Total Investment in Early Childhood Development Programs and Services in 2000-2001		**$50,038,000**

* Programs funded by the Department of Health are delivered by regional health districts.

KidsFirst

Our Vision

Vulnerable children enjoy a good start in life and are nurtured and supported by caring families and communities. In targeted high-needs communities, supports and services are provided through partnerships between families, communities, service organizations and government.

Goals

- High risk children are born and remain healthy;
- High risk children are supported and nurtured by healthy, well-functioning families;
- High risk children are able to learn, cope and problem-solve;
- High risk children are free from abuse, injury, disability, preventable disease and death;
- High risk children have access to a comprehensive, integrated and developmentally sequential system of supports and services.

Our Strategy - Moving Forward

The work undertaken during 2000-01 was directed towards the further development of Saskatchewan's Early Childhood Development Strategy. Our immediate focus is on children and their families living in circumstances that put them at social and/or economic risk. Most of the new federal resources are being allocated to Saskatchewan communities where there are large concentrations of this target group (i.e. high risk communities). Last March, 2001, planning for a new comprehensive and integrated program, *KidsFirst*, was completed. Through *KidsFirst*, we will reach out to our most vulnerable children in the first five years of their lives.

Under the *KidsFirst* initiative:

- Women who are using alcohol or other drugs during their pregnancy will be identified early through a **pre-natal outreach and screening process**, and offered support to help reduce or prevent Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS);
- Babies will be **screened** at birth to determine the challenges faced by their families, and will be referred to the *KidsFirst* program, if needed;
- Lay home visitors will provide intensive support to eligible families before and after the birth of their children through a **home visitation** program;
- **Mental health and addiction treatment** services will be enhanced and dedicated to working with these families;
- **Childcare and early learning programs** will be expanded to support children in high-risk families to reach their developmental and learning potential;
- **Parent support programs** will assist parents to deal with issues affecting them. These services could range from parent support groups to assistance in connecting with literacy and pre-employment programs.

Eight communities in the southern part of the province and all communities in the north have been selected to receive funding to implement the *KidsFirst* program. These communities are:

- Meadow Lake
- Moose Jaw
- Nipawin
- North Battleford
- Northern Saskatchewan
- Prince Albert
- Regina (4 neighbourhoods)
- Saskatoon (6 neighbourhoods)
- Yorkton

Planning and local development is ongoing in each of these communities. These activties include setting up structures and processes for community level needs assessment and planning, hiring staff, developing partnerships with existing programs, services and other relevant stakeholders, and working hard to continue implementation of the program.

Outside of targeted communities, Early Childhood Community Developers will work with community partners to improve awareness of the needs of high-risk families and realign services to be more responsive to this population.

Much work has already been done in our communities. The additional resources dedicated to *KidsFirst* will allow current gaps and barriers to be identified and filled. In the future, development of a comprehensive, integrated system will support vulnerable children as they move through the critical early years.

Other Initiatives

In addition, beginning in 2001-02, money will be used to improve existing services for early childhood development. This includes:

- Enhancement of training opportunities and wages for child care staff;
- The addition of 104 spaces for Saskatchewan children with developmental disabilities under the Saskatchewan Early Childhood Intervention Program;
- The enhancement of Pre-kindergarten programs in Saskatchewan, enabling more children to access early learning opportunities; and
- Resources for the development of an infant mortality initiative.

By implementing these initiatives, support for vulnerable children and their families are being greatly enhanced.

Future reports will highlight the progress and impact of these programs on Saskatchewan children and their families.

For More Information...

Contact Saskatchewan Learning at

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national children's agenda